

We Are All in This Together

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Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts and experiences in dealing with the livestock industry in Manitoba, why I feel it is important to see that this industry can thrive, and that environmental concerns can be addressed.

There are a number of people and groups that have involvement in the livestock industry in this province. Livestock producers, grain farmers, truckers, builders, unions, business people, rural and urban people, as well as municipal, provincial and federal governments together must make it work for all of Manitoba.

I first became involved when I received a call one evening from a representative of a feed company wanting to build a sow barn in our RM. As a newly elected Reeve, I was excited about the prospect of new development in our municipality, but did not realize what my council was about to go through in the next few months

The project . . .

I was told about timelines for the project, which were quite tight. The proponent wanted to move as quickly as possible, so we called a "Special Council Meeting" to have this proposal presented to the rest of council. This "Special Council Meeting" later became a contentious issue, as we were accused of trying to push this project through without the public's knowledge, even though at this meeting, it was decided the proponent would go and speak to people in a two-mile radius of the proposed sow barn and make them aware of their plans. There were two special lessons to be learned from this. Never let the proponent rush you, and never call a special council meeting to have this proposed to council. I had a number of calls that weekend from people with concerns regarding the hog barn. People wanted, and were given, a meeting with our council to present their concerns at the local town hall. Those opposed to the project were also quickly forming a special interest group to voice their opposition. I called the Minister of Environments' Office for help only to find out there were no regulations or guidelines regarding "Livestock Operations." I also spoke with Andrew Dickson from Manitoba Agriculture and Food and explained the situation to him. He told me about the Technical Review Committee that had just been set up by the province and also offered to have the Committee come out to a meeting that was called by the citizens of the Interlake. Was I ever thankful they were there! They had the expertise to answer the questions and deal with the number of issues that were brought up by concerned citizens, and that members of council could never be expected to answer.

A number of people came to that meeting with only one objective in mind, which was to see that the hog barn was not built. Many people that came to that meeting had their fears regarding the barn alleviated because people from the Province of Manitoba were there to answer their questions. Those opposed to the barn were angry that people with expertise could address their concerns. They then came to our next council meeting to once again voice their objections in the hog operation. This time they were louder and more unruly. At the following council meeting those opposed came with a consultant, media and intimidators who were careful that their threats of physical violence towards council members were made when the media was not in earshot.

I remember their consultant telling us this was no place for an earthen storage because the manure would flow directly into the aquifer. He spent the next hour telling us this was no place to spread manure because we had no rain for a month and there were water puddles standing in the fields. Those opposed to the barns suggested they could be built in areas that had no place to spread manure and where aquifer sensitivity was an issue which basically suggested to council "We don't care about the environment just get the barn away from our place."

I later had the opportunity to have a meeting with then Minister of Environment, Mr. Glen Cummings. I discussed the need for regulations regarding livestock operations. I do not believe Mr. Cummings was the Minister when the regulations were announced but I do have to thank him and his department for taking the initiative to start the regulation process. We also spoke about members of council not having the expertise in environmental issues to deal with livestock operations. The Province dealt with that by putting in the need for licensing for earthen storage facilities and later by large livestock facilities filing Manure Management plans with the province.

What needs to be done

I still believe the Province has to go further in this area and certainly agree with recommendations made by the livestock review panel that call for a dual licensing system where a permit is required from the municipality (if it meets their planning and zoning bylaws) and a permit from the Province (if it meets environmental standards). There is also a need for more enforcement by the province. From my experience, people would like to see more inspection and enforcement done by the Province.

There is also a large responsibility on the producer to live up to the commitments to work with municipalities when setting up these operations. Just a couple of examples that happened in our RM where the proponents really put our council on the spot and gave the opponents the ammunition to say, "We told you so." One of the operations that were proposed was in a fairly sensitive groundwater area. Council told the proponents they were not in favor of the earthen storage on this site, yet the proponents still put their application for earthen storage for this site. This raised a lot of concerns from area residents. The first time manure was spread off this operation, they were careless with how they handled their equipment and over-spread their manure. This again left council in an awkward situation. After all our council went through to support these operations, these types of situations show a total lack of respect for councils as well as people residing in the area. This also makes it a lot tougher for any council to support the next operation, and a lot tougher for the next proponent to have full council approval for their operation.

Hog producers can also do other things to make themselves more acceptable in the community. From my experience, the main reason for opposition is smell from earthen storage. A simple thing like negative pressure covers on the earthen storages can go a long way to making it more acceptable in the area. Pumping manure and not hauling it down the roads can make the operations more acceptable to area residents. If manure must be hauled down the roads, it should be done when roads are dry so there is minimal damage to the roads.

Conclusions

One of the conditions we set in our municipality is that livestock operations are responsible for maintenance of roads during construction and while hauling manure. There are many places in this province for intensive livestock operations. There are also a number of places that, for environmental and social reasons, large livestock operations are not acceptable. I do believe people who subdivide and build homes in agricultural areas must realize that a livestock operation may be built near them. I think municipalities should be very clear as to whether or not they want to have livestock operations in their area. If a municipality accepts livestock operations, they should be very clear on where they can or cannot be located. This Province has much to gain from the livestock industry. It can no longer pay subsidies to ship grain and jobs out of this Province. There is a lot more at stake than just jobs in the barns, feedlots or ranches. We have the choice in this province to export \$4000 worth of barley or \$40,000 worth of cut-and-wrapped meat plus the jobs that go along with this. Our rural and urban economies can only benefit. It seems to be the "in" thing to protest local development and industries, then we wonder why local hospitals are closing and schools are cutting back teachers...